

Short Welcome address to the Polish Colleagues on  
the Opening Ceremony of the Polish Political  
Science National Conference,  
(Lublin, September 18th, 2018)

Distinguished Authorities, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and  
Gentlemen:

It is a great honour for me and a pleasure to have the chance to address to you on this great occasion, at the opening ceremony of the Polish Political Science National Congress, organized by the Polish Political Science Association, the Polish Academy of Sciences (Committee of Political Science), and the Faculty of Political Science-Marie Curie-Sklodowska University.

I want to start by thanking the President of the Polish Political Science Association, Professor Arkadiusz Zukowski, for inviting me to attend the Conference as an honorary guest, and to address you all in this opening ceremony. I am really sorry I couldn't do it to Lublin in person, enjoying being there with you all, and having the chance to know such a beautiful landscape. Previous commitments prevent me from being there in person, but I nevertheless wanted to send this short greeting address, asking my good friend Professor Zukowski to read it aloud on my behalf.

I'm convinced it is a great success that such a lot of colleagues gather to spend some days thinking and discussing about our political

systems and their evolution. And I want to start by congratulating you for doing so. The intense transformations our societies and political systems experienced in the last years make it even more relevant for Political Scientist to think about where, why and how our political systems are evolving. As many of you will remember, some decades ago Political Science was considered to a large extent a “secondary” discipline, not so efficient and relevant in the production of “practical results” for our societies. Engineering, Chemistry, Physics -or Economy among Social Sciences-, were much more valued and considered as relevant for the future of our societies than our discipline.

Nevertheless, the developments our societies and polities went through in the last decade -many of them probably rooted in earlier transformations- have radically transform the way Political Science is perceived and the role it seems to have nowadays among our citizens and authorities. Today what political scientist have to say is understood as relevant for our societies.

Anyhow, our Discipline, as part of the Social Sciences, always had a “practical aim”, as Aristoteles or -more recently- Habermas put it. And it is so even if sometimes we weren’t able to sustain this perspective efficiently in front of our societies. Nowadays, many citizens turn back to Political Science looking for answers or directions for their actions as citizens, or for explanations on the evolution our political systems and democracies are taking. It seems that the perspective differentiating authoritarianism and democracy is not enough any longer to explain where we (our societies and political systems) are, and where we are heading. More complex and

sophisticated answers are to be provided by political scientists.

That is why I think it is rather important that the Organizing Committee picked such a theme for its Congress: “The State in Times of Change”. Of course, we still have to think and discuss about the State. We have been discussing about the crisis of the State for decades now, at least from the mid 1970s, both from the perspective of the right-wing positions (its overload and the governability difficulties: Huntington, Watanuki, Crozier, or Fukuyama...) and that of the left-wing positions (its legitimation crisis and its fiscal crisis (Habermas, Offe, O’Connor). We discussed by and large about the crisis of the welfare states models, and how to maintain it under the general umbrella of the European Social Model, or whether this is possible in such an interconnected and globalized world. Democracy became more complex as did the societies it serves. Therefore, our discussions also have to become more sophisticated.

Among many other topics, nowadays, we are debating about diversity and social integration (how to face the immigration flows many of our countries are experiencing); social networks and communication malaises (how to cope with fake-news or other powers intervention on our national deliberation and election processes); or citizens reaction to all these changes and increase of uncertainties (success of populist proposals in many of our “sophisticated” countries).

Of course, there is not just one reason or factor explaining these intense changes and trends; we, as social scientist, know that usually its needed a combination of factors or sets of factors to explain political changes. And, of course, I won’t dare to suggest what I consider the most important ones. That is, precisely, the aim of this

Congress: to discuss those tendencies and factors, by and large, and both in a national and international perspectives. And I want to congratulate you for doing so. It is our responsibility as political scientists to do so, not hiding ourselves behind highly specialized and fragmented (and, probably, irrelevant) research questions. Of course, this is a difficult task, given the increasing diversity and enlarged complexity our political systems experienced in the last decades. I will just underline very briefly three of these changes (being convinced there are many other relevant ones, and that these I mention may not be the most salient ones):

1. Firstly, nowadays, more diverse and sophisticated citizens find a larger availability of means to inform themselves, and to interact among them and with the institutions, leaders and other political actors. These new available instruments enlarge the democratic potential, but -at the same time- they open the door to other practices that may lead to the reduction of our liberties and options.

2. Secondly, politics is today much more complex than it used to be let's say 75 years ago: The functions we expect the State to perform, and the services we expect it to provide are much larger, diverse and complex. Therefore, it has become much more difficult for the State (and its actors) to provide solutions that satisfy citizens' demands and expectations. It is much more difficult today to try to put together proposals and initiatives to face social and political problems, or to improve our societies: More functions increasingly complex, and more diverse, sophisticated and demanding citizenships.

3. Finally, in the international scope, globalization processes increased to an unprecedented extent the interdependencies and

interconnections among different political actors, public-institutional ones (States and organizations) and private ones (corporations, among others). In top of that, collective action and social movements started to have also an international interconnection, that allows for coordination and imitation effects. Even if many of the changes our political systems are going through are specific of each of our countries, there are other patterns that share common traits. That interconnections and interdependencies make it much more difficult to provide solutions in a national (state-based) context. The notions of borders and margins are to be understood in a new different way we still don't know. What is clear is that the old notions of sovereignty, borders, and national powers are to be reconsidered and redefined, taking into account new factors and circumstances.

These changes, as many other we are witnessing, lead to deep changes in the way we are to understand and to explain the State and its dynamics nowadays. That is why I want to congratulate the Polish Political Science Association, the Polish Academy of Sciences (Committee of Political Science) and the Faculty of Political Science-Marie Curie-Sklodowska University for organizing a National Congress under such a theme, and with these four thematic areas: 1. State's environment and factors of change; 2. State as a subject of internal politics in time of change; 3. State as a subject of international relations in times of change; 4. And Research on state in times of change.

I'm fully convinced that whatever changes we see in our political systems in the decades to come, the State will still be there, playing a key role in the organization of our political relations. Let's face those

changes and try to explain what factors drive them and in which direction. That way we will be able to help our societies to decide democratically what we want to do as citizens in this collective interaction in an interconnected world.

Congratulations on this occasion for the task you have for the following days in this Congress discussing and debating on such a relevant topic: I'm convinced this is the best service political scientists can produce for and on behalf of their societies. Congratulations to the Polish Political Science Association, the Polish Academy of Sciences (Committee of Political Science) and the Faculty of Political Science-Marie Curie-Sklodowska University for organizing this Conference with such a theme. Best wishes for these coming discussions and debates. I'm sure they will be really intense and fruitful. I'm looking forward to see the results and to have the chance to meet you all in the next Polish Political Science Conference.

Thanks very much again and best wishes,

Pablo Oñate

President

European Confederation of Political Science Associations